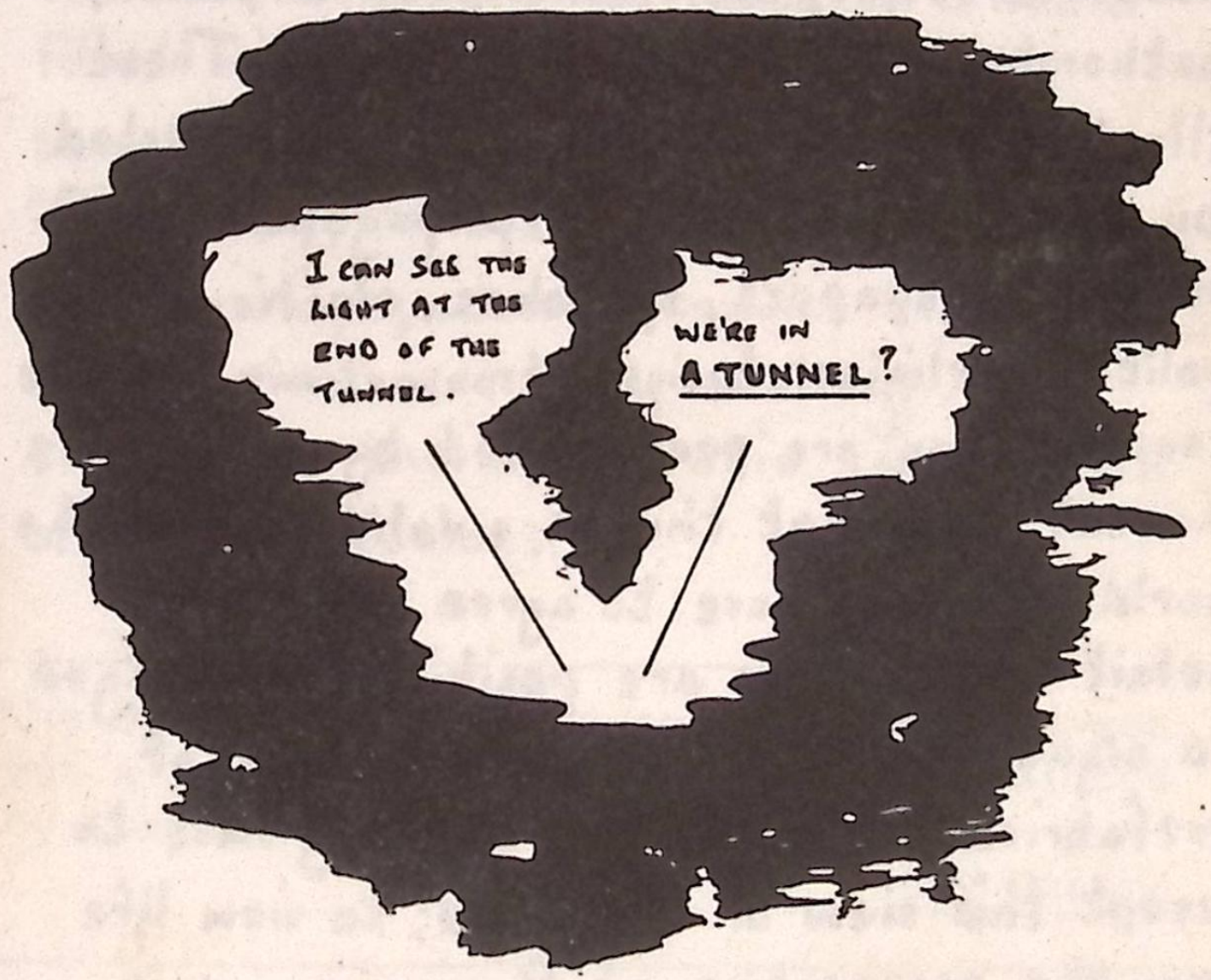
Spectacular Times

CITIES OF ILLUSION

Pocketbook Series

"....knowing begins with the awareness of the deceptiveness of our common sense perceptions, in the sense that our picture of physical reality does not correspond to what is 'really real' and, mainly, in the sense that most people are half-awake, half-dreaming, and are unaware that most of what they hold to be true and self-evident is illusion produced by the suggestive influence of the social world in which they live. Knowing, then, begins with the shattering of illusions, with disillusionment."

Erich Fromm



Parenti notes in "U.S. Strategy in the Gulf," "A major problem for the U.S. ruling class. . .is the way the American people keep drifting off into reality and the way they repeatedly must be brought back to face the harsh illusions propagated by their rulers."

In the Society of the Spectacle we live in a world of carefully constructed illusions — about ourselves, each other, about power, authority, justice and daily life. These illusions are both constructed and reflected by education, advertising, propaganda, television, newspapers, speeches, elections, politics, religion, business transactions and the courts. They are perpetuated by us from the moment we accept this as a valid view of the world. We don't have to agree with every detail — in fact we are positively encouraged to argue and take sides over a host of prefabricated trifles - we simply have to accept this view of the world; to view life from the perspective of Power.

"That's life", "These things are sent to try us", "You have to take the rough with the smooth", "Thats the way it goes....."
this lament whose weft unites the most diverse conversations has so perverted our sensibility that it passes for the commonest of human dispositions.

Raoul Vaneigem

Once we accept power's perspective we can be safely let loose in a world filled with people who accept the same perspective.
That way, by our conversations, relationships, advice, 'common sense', and our simplest everyday dealings, we engage in the democratic construction of social illusions.

The Spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people mediated by images.

Guy Debord

Most people will tell you that they aren't fooled by advertising and that they don't believe all they read in the newspapers or see on television. We should not cynically dismiss these claims - even when we see them continue to uncritically consume the advertised products, read the newspapers and watch the television — to do so would be to totally misunderstand the nature of propaganda in spectacular society. The details don't matter as long as we see things through the eyes of power; as long as we remain passively receptive towards the overall design. We have only to look around the world to see how societies differ in detail. But no matter how they differ in detail — be it in London, Washington, Moscow, Peking, Tokyo, Havana, Capetown, Harare or Sydney — the perspective is the same. Everywhere it's hats off to power, work, sacrifice, inauthenticity.

"Certainly in size, scale and spectacle, Australia is equal to the States and in many ways more exciting."

All power preserves itself by the construction of illusions; by the perpetration of a massive confidence trick. Violent acts of repression by the state are designed to 'make an example' of those who dissent. As real as these acts of repression are to the individuals and groups who suffer them, in terms of society as a whole it is bluff. No police force or army in the world could hold down one tenth of its population by force alone.

A.S.Neill recalled an incident he witnessed in a railway compartment. A small child was pestering its mother to be allowed to play in the corridor of the train. The mother finally put an end to the child's pleas by saying that there was a policeman in the corridor who would lock up naughty children caught playing there. Neill reflected that, had the child gained the courage to open the door, it would have made two very important discoveries - a) there is no policeman in the corridor, and b) Mummy is a liar.

In the 'democratic' countries dissent is managed via the ballot box - a system which offers any choice that keeps power intact. If you don't like the government you can vote for an alternative government - but you can't vote for an alternative <u>to</u> government.

Every day through schools, newspapers and television, power reaffirms its perspective. It is difficult to see daily life from any other perspective because all our reference points have been given to us by power.

Alice explained, as well as she could, that she had lost her way.
"I don't know what you mean by <u>your</u> way", said the Red Queen, "all the ways about here belong to <u>me</u>."

A mass media allows for the mass dissemination of illusions. Where reality contradicts the illusion it is either ignored, ridiculed or simply changed to make it fit the desired image.

Newspapers should be careful not to publish photographs composed to suit particular stories in a way which could mislead, the Press Council said yesterday.

The council upheld a complaint by Mr Derek Lamb, of Ormesby Drive, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, that the Daily Mail cut and reassembled a photograph shortening the distance between the face of a police officer and the face of a black youth shouting. It created a deceptive image and the photograph thus published was a fiction, said Mr Lamb.

The newspaper told the press council that virtually every photograph in a newspaper had to be edited.

Even the *Daily Mail's* reporter was moved, to the alarm of his newsdesk. 'I told them that the majority of people out there were absolutely genuine, but they insisted on me filing the usual, loony lefty copy. They are sending someone else down to take over tomorrow who is more "politically reliable", I suppose.'

WALT Disney made snuff movies. You will remember the classic lemming scene in White Wilderness (1958). Brian Vallee, a Canadian TV producer, has spent five months researching the making of such touching displays of animal phenomena in Disney movies and has established that 1,000 of the little rodents were bought off Eskimo children and flown to 'Alberta.

When the wretched creatures refused to commit suicide on cue the Disney crew obligingly stepped in and threw them off the edge of a cliff into a river.

Obvious errors only highlight how irrelevant the information was in the first place.

In the desert the Iranians advanced swiftly.

The Sunday Times

An Iraqui Soviet-built tank moves in

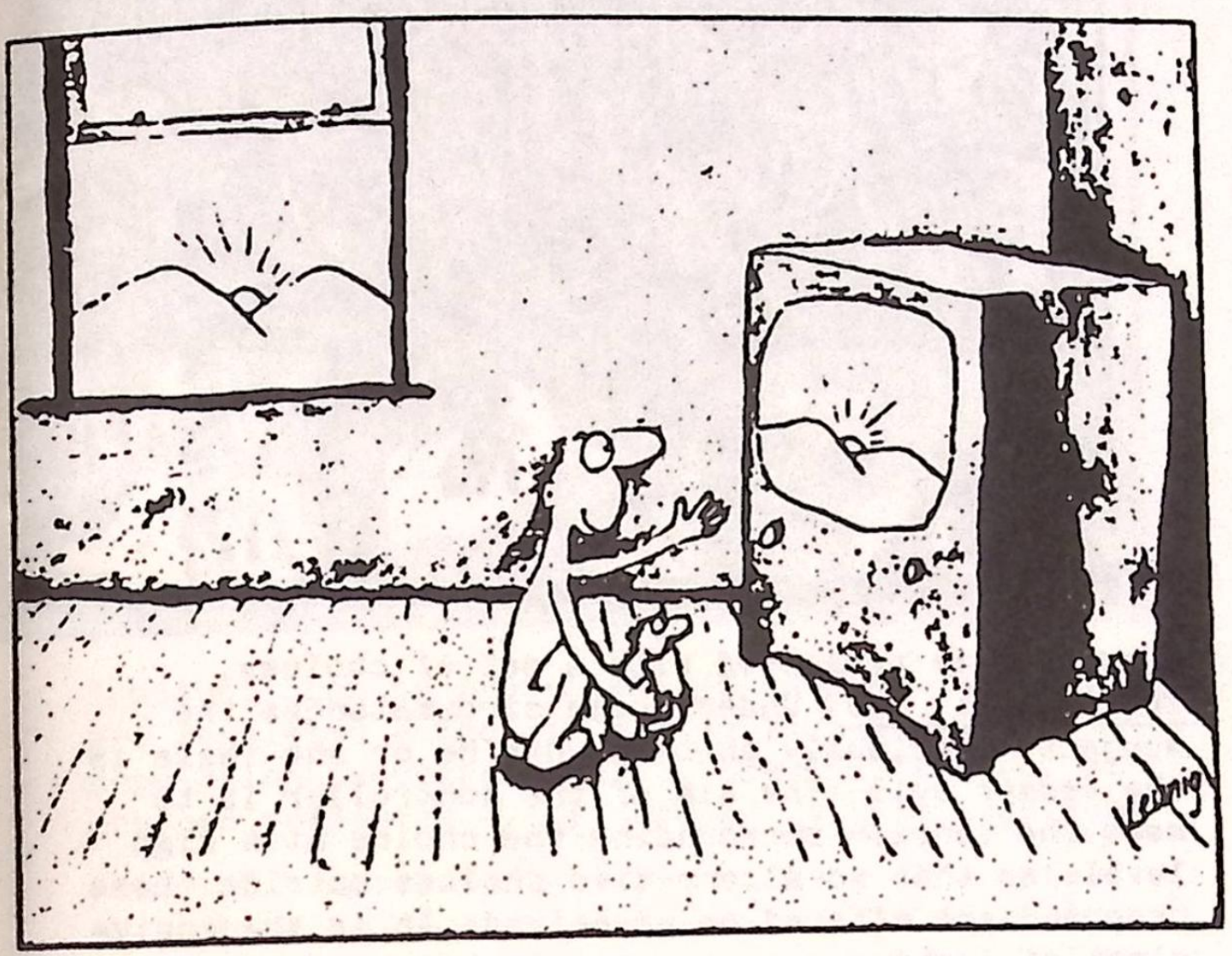
The Observer

Even in extremis it cannot see itself as a participant in real life.

By PAUL VOGLE

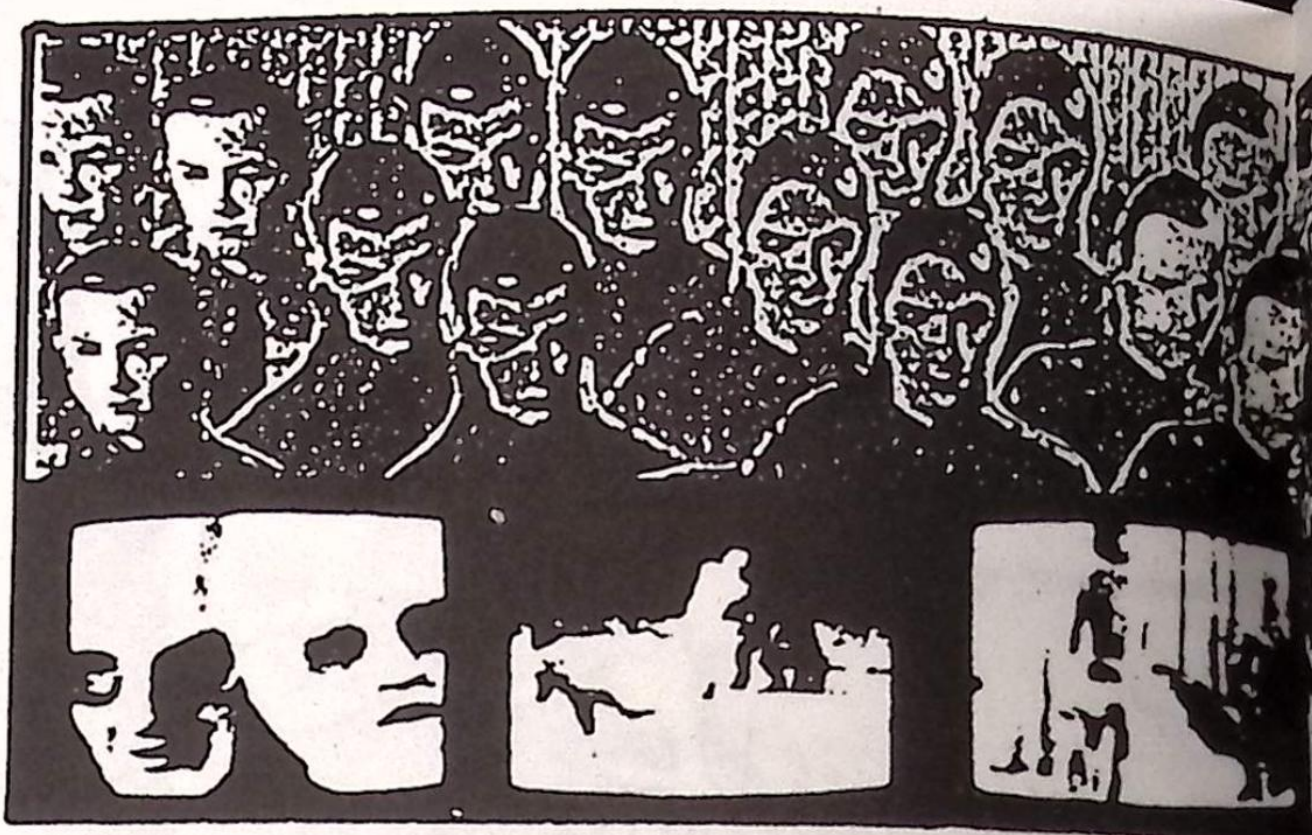
who was on the last plane out of Da Nang, South Vietnam, yesterday

ONLY the fastest, the strongest and the meanest of a huge mob got a ride in the last plane from Da Nang yesterday.

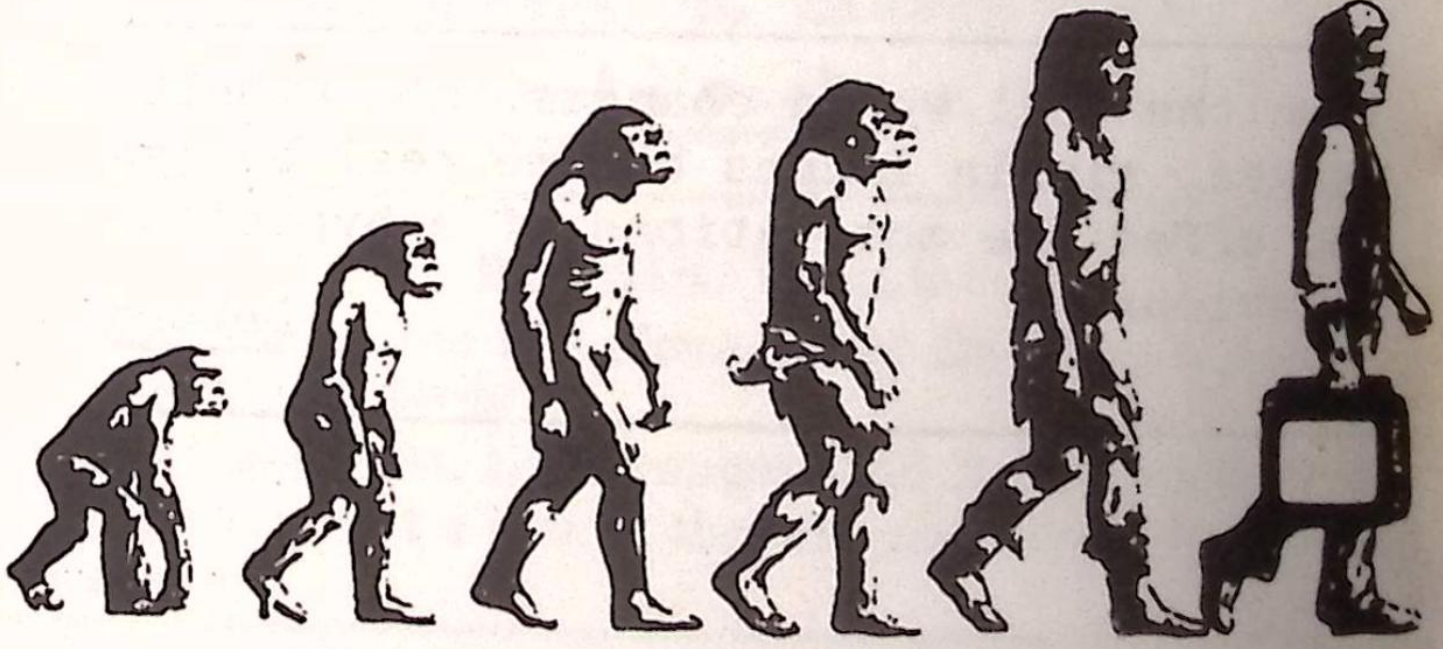


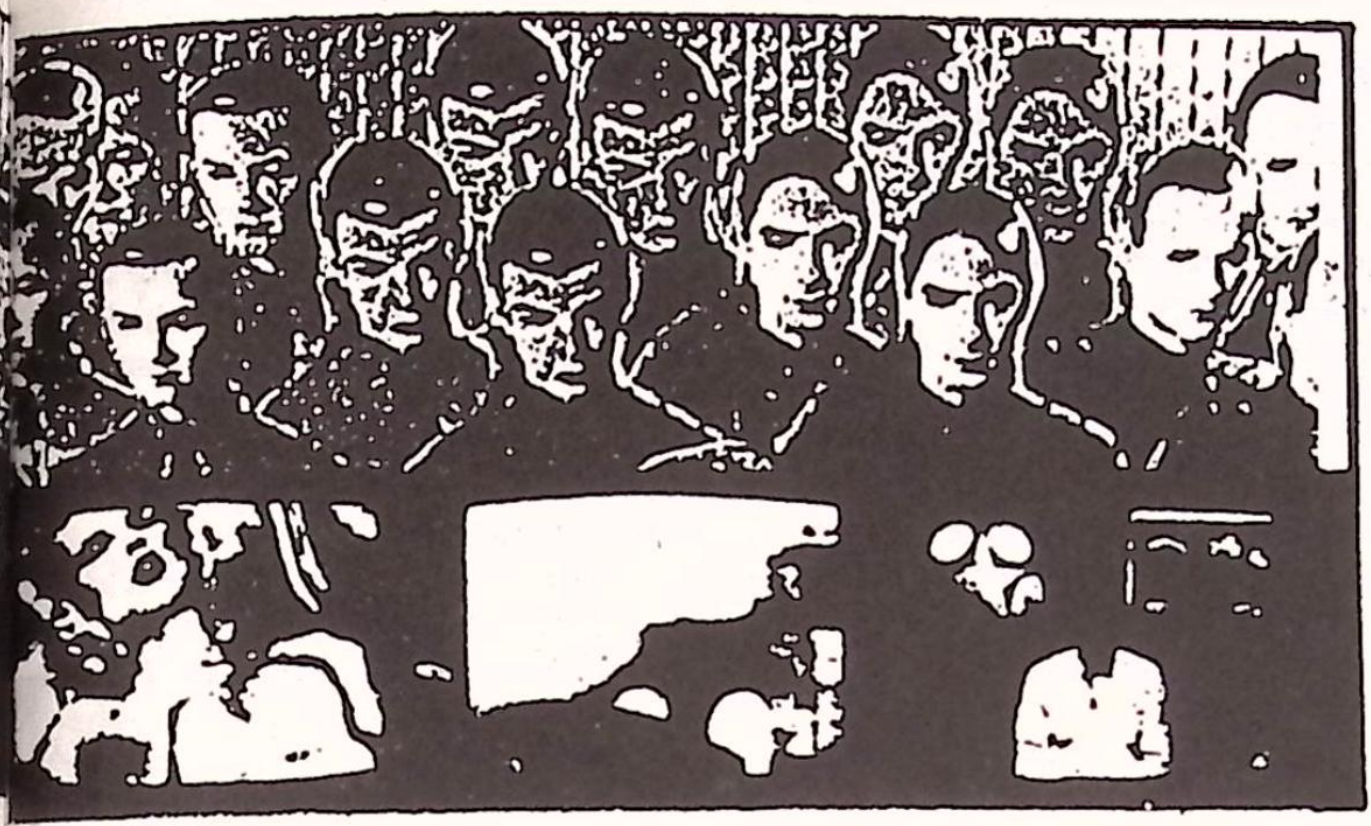
When the real world changes into simple images, simple images become real beings and effective motivations of a hypnotic behaviour.

Debord



A subject is presented with a set of choices. They are all bad. Under these circumstances the subject consciously chooses what he or she feels is the lesser evil. The aim of the controller is to keep the tension surrounding the choice at a high level, so that no alternative choices outside those proposed are offered or perceived. It is the equivalent of locking someone in a mental box, the perfect controlled environment.
Once one such choice is made, the next set of

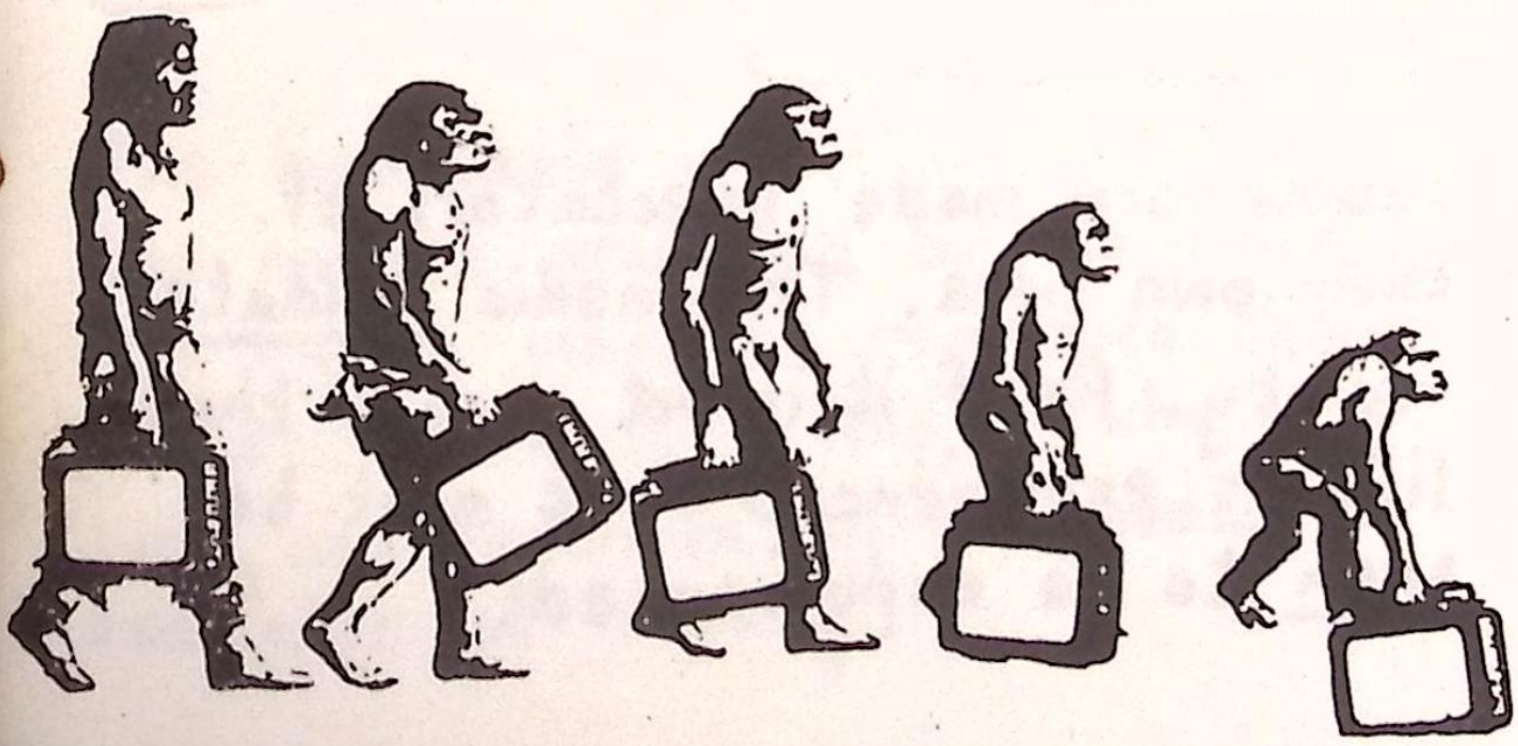




'choices' can be presented. As long as the choices are regulated - that is the subject or subject population perceives that it has only the set of choices presented - the outcome is also regulated.

....it is important that you - the victim - feel that there is no cause and effect in this world, simply information. From here on in there will be no release from the tension, only an ever escalating series of crises....

Lonnie Wolfe

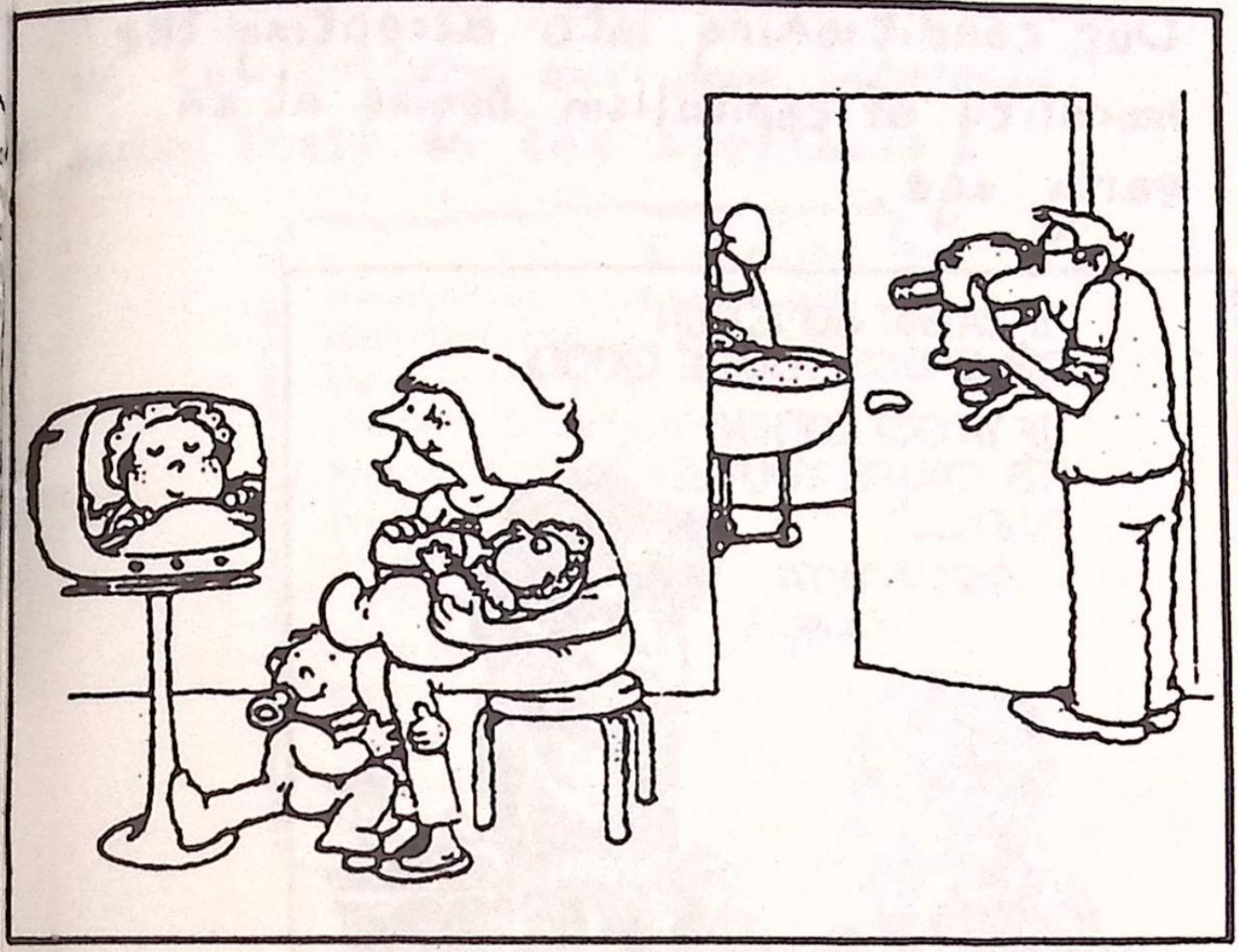


Two people were arrested: one for resisting an officer of the law, a new offence under section 10 of the 1977 Criminal Law Act; the other for obstruction. A *New Standard* photographer who was held, apparently for obstruction, was released after other members of the press had protested to the police and threatened to put their cameras down until he was freed—a tactic that has been adopted recently in France when press photographers put down their cameras in protest at police behaviour.

On January 3, 1914, in the city of Juarez, Villa signed an exclusive contract with Mutual for the sum of $25,000. It was also contractually agreed that Villa would do his best to win all his battles in sunlight and to forbid the presence of any other rival cameramen on the battlefield! Aitken also stipulated that in case Mutual did not succeed in shooting enough suitable material during the actual battle, Villa would guarantee to re-enact it the next day before the cameras.

One enterprising US police department worked out an ingenious arrangement with the TV and film vehicle covering the head of the march. Unknown to its organizers, the police controlled the speed of the march by signalling to this vehicle to speed up or slow down.

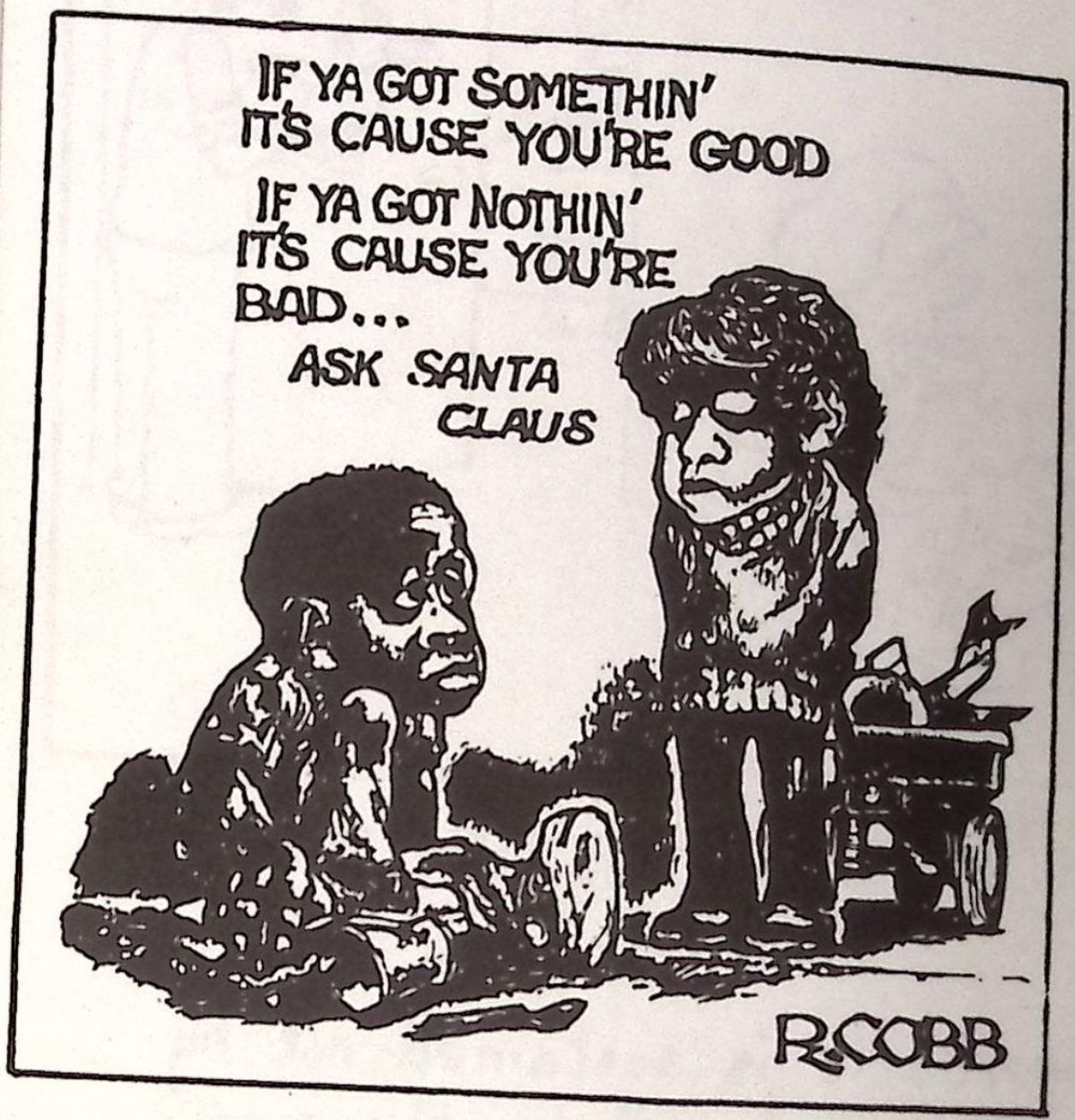
People are made spectators of their own lives. The media validates reality. As if it is not enough that life is experienced — it must be seen to be experienced.



DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE IMAGE

The Spectacle is sustained not by the images produced by the media, but by us when we reproduce these images in our daily life — which, in turn, are reported by the media as examples of 'reality'.

Our conditioning into accepting the morality of capitalism begins at an early age.



'A penniless man dying of starvation has a desperate "need", but no "demand", for food.'

school textbook
'O' level Economics

Propaganda and advertising encourage us to identify our own interests with those of the Spectacle.

Each of the thousands of oil companies, like each steel company, knows that the only way to stay ahead of rivals is to keep developing new or improved services and products, always at the lowest possible price.

"To make sure this kind of progress continues, we must guard industry's freedom of competitive action with the same zeal that we guard our freedom as individuals."

Believe in freedom.

Believe in HONDA

It is a mark of the level of our conditioning that, when confronted with such twaddle, we don't all roar with laughter.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
And waited in a row.

'How to sell your way through a Recession'

How to develop the killer instinct.
How to find more NEW customers.
How to make every call effective.
How to win more business from your competitors.
How to convert more quotations into orders.
How to overcome 'price-fright'.
How to get the customers to pay more.
and How to close more sales

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said,
"To play them such a trick,
After we've brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick!"
The Carpenter said nothing but
"The butter's spread too thick!"

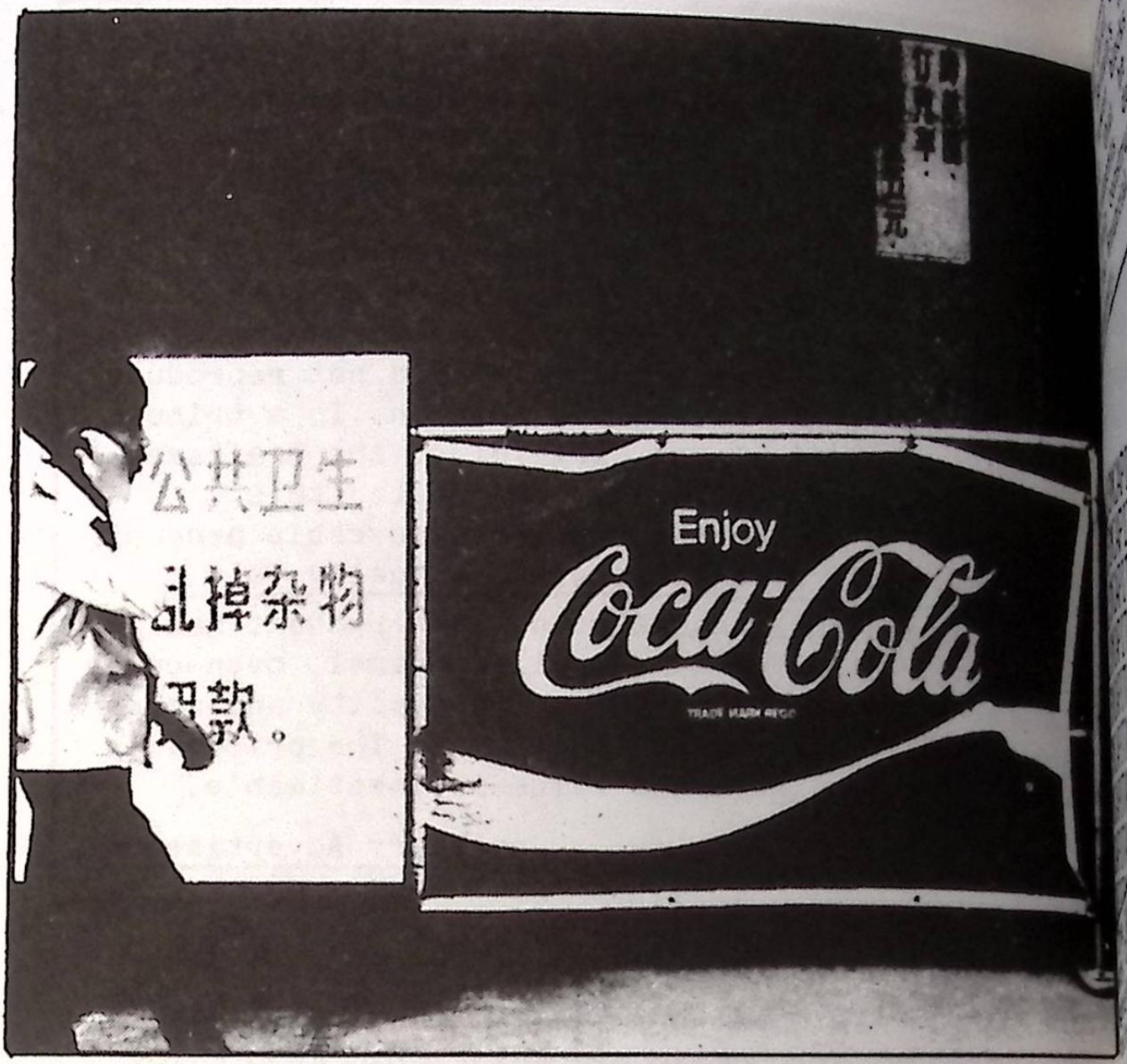
For thousands of years the Large Blue butterfly fluttered among the wild thyme and grassy dells of England where each summer it carefully laid its eggs, much to the delight of naturalists everywhere. In the summer of 1979, the last 22 adults emerged above the hot, sunny slopes of Devon, but they produced no eggs. Due to the gradual ploughing up of the meadows where the wild thyme grew, this lovely butterfly did not reproduce and has now become extinct in Britain. In a tribute to the sad plight of the Large Blue, the craftsmen of The Jewellers' Guild have re-created this delicate creature in the form of a moveable pendant - so true to life that its wings actually fold.

Richly plated in 22 carat gold, each pendant has a brilliant coating of hand applied enamel, oven-cured to ensure the highest standard of quality and comes complete with its own 18" neckchain. The price is £15.95, but as a gift the value is inestimable.

Jewellery Advertisement

The Spectacle revives the dead, imports the foreign and reinterprets the existing. The time span required for things to acquire the proper quaint banality...continually decreases; the original is marketed simultaneously with its spoof, from which it is often scarcely distinguishable; aesthetic discussions increasingly centre around the simple question as to whether something is a parody or not.

Ken Knabb



The basic tautological character of the Spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are at the same time its goal. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

Debord

The former chief executive of one of Britain's largest builders of tower blocks has acknowledged that he destroyed documents detailing faults in their construction to preserve the financial viability of his company.

Yorkshire presented the committee with new evidence of high dust readings in a factory owned by Turner and Newall, Britain's largest asbestos company. However, the television company's executives were disappointed that instead of questioning the evidence, the committee, led by the chairman, Mr John Gorst, MP, asked for an explanation of the researchers' motives.

Mr Gorst asked whether the researchers, Mr James Cutler, and Mr Peter Moore, were Communists. He asked why they had not examined an alternative industrial disease

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The giant Swiss drug company, Ciba-Geigy, has admitted spraying pesticide on unprotected Egyptian children to test its safety.

The pesticide, named Galecron, was subsequently linked with cancer, and Ciba-Geigy conceded last night that it deeply regretted using the children as "volunteers."

REGULATIONS covering workers handling dangerous chemicals and pesticides, which should have come into force today, have been shelved in the face of opposition from industry.

"Babies are replaceable," is the word from Dr Illio Gauditz, forest products chemist for the giant Weyerhauser corporation, in answer to charges that the company's herbicide spray programme causes pregnant women to miscarry.

Later the company's community relations manager explained this statement. "It was spoken from a strictly scientific point of view, purely biological. In the animal kingdom, including humans, if a woman loses a child through miscarriage, or even when it's older through an accident, the woman can have another one. That's really all she (Gauditz) meant."

Much more satisfying was a job he did for the Army, which wasn't nearly so squeamish. The Army wanted to film the effects of an anti-personnel device designed to blow legs off. The film had to be realistic to encourage overseas sales.

THE tobacco industry has agreed to give £1 1m to promote health research on condition that the effects of tobacco are excluded from the researchers' reports.

Mrs Lawley's illness, and the effects of Quixalin on animals, closely resemble another drug-induced disease called SMON (subacute myelo-optic neuropathy). It is caused by Enterovioform, a drug closed related to Quixalin.

SMON caused blindness and paralysis in at least 10,000 Japanese who took the drug. Ciba-Geigy, the manufacturer of Enterovioform, has admitted in a formal statement in Japan that its drug was a cause of SMON. Nevertheless Ciba-Geigy continues to sell Enterovioform in countries that permit it.

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IT IS sometimes said that the advanced technology of one generation becomes the schoolboy physics for the next generation.

If this was ever true, it is certainly more so today, with the rate of introduction of new technology accelerating, and it will continue to acelerate for as long as we can accept the rate of change.

"To save the economy, we must buy, buy anything."
President Eisenhower

.....the economy cannot stop making us consume more and more, and to consume without respite is to change illusions at an accelerating pace which gradually dissolves the illusion of change. We find ourselves alone, unchanged, frozen in the empty space behind the waterfall of gadgets, family cars and paperbacks.

Raoul Vaneigem

Food manufacturers said yesterday that proposed Government legislation aimed at outlawing false bargain offer claims could push up prices in the food sector, which are running at half the national inflation rate.

Only two in 10 understood that, when the rate of inflation falls from 20 to 15 per cent, prices will still rise.

Whatever happens, don't do anything until you hear from the authorities; your safety cannot be guaranteed if you take it upon yourself to act.
Stay in your homes, cars or shopping centres.
If you stay at home, watch television or listen to loud music. During the day, remember there is no safer place for you than on the job. If you are too young to work, go to school. For your own good, do as you are told.
The authorities remind you: the streets of your community are not safe, so if you must leave your home, to seek entertainment or diversion, drive, do not walk to your destination. If you find yourself unexpectedly on the street on foot, speak to no one.
Remember that the maintenance of order rests solely upon your willingness to follow instructions.

Modern Citizen

The consumption of hysteria has become a principle of social production, but one where the real banality of the goods keeps breaking the surface, and letting loose a necessary violence - the violence of the man or woman who has been given everything, but finds that every thing is phoney.

Postscript to
"On the Poverty of Student Life"
Strasbourg Situationists

In the same programme Harold Salisbury, a former Chief Constable for York, and the North and East Riding of Yorkshire, gave a graphic picture of the work of the Special Branch in this country.

THE ENEMY IS IDENTIFIED.....

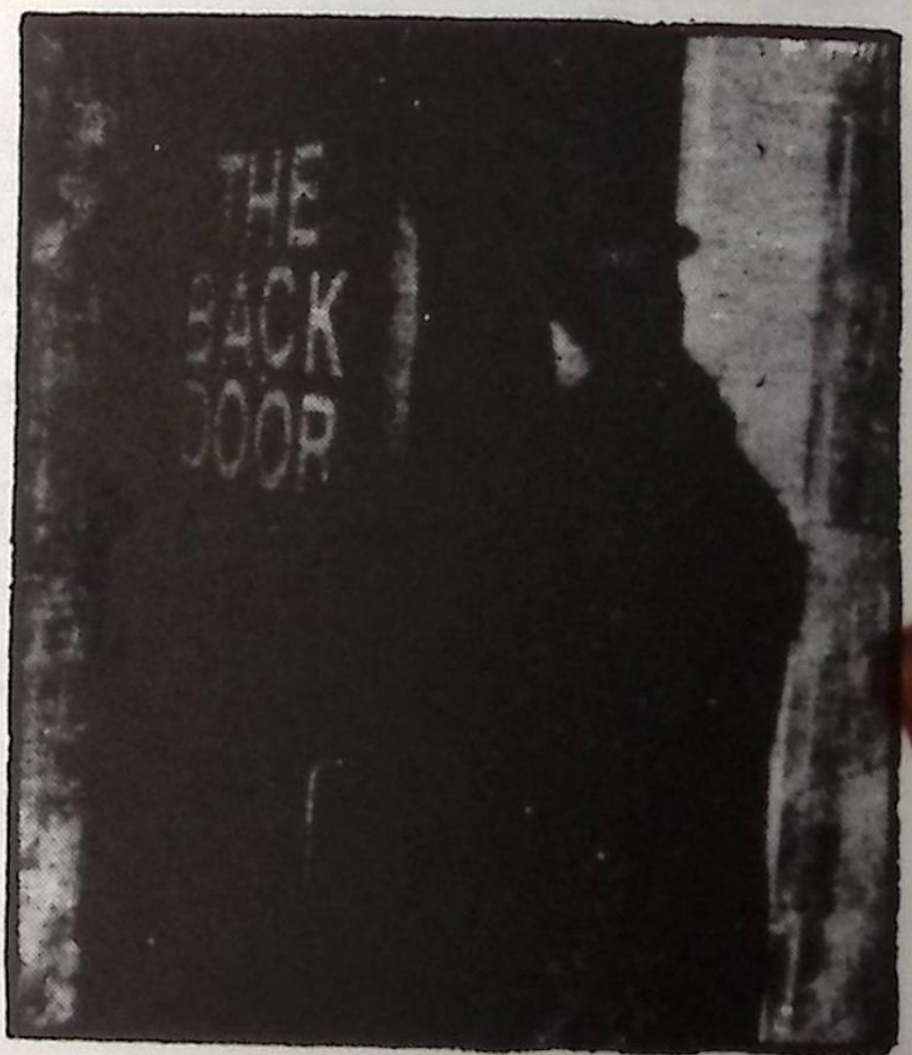
Interviewer: Which groups would be in the files here?
Salisbury: Obviously anyone who shows any affinity towards Communism – that's commonsense – the IRA, the PLO and I would say anyone who's decrying marriage, family life, trying to break that up, pushing drugs or advocating the acceptance of certain drugs, homosexuality, indiscipline in schools, weak penalties for anti-social crimes, pushing that sort of thing. Oh, a whole gamut of things like that that could be pecking away at the foundations of our society and weakening it.
Interviewer: And do you regard these people as subversives?
Salisbury: Well, in a word, yes.

..... AND PROTECTION IS OFFERED.

Then, through the line of policemen surrounding the station, walked a group of about 15 men dressed in jeans, casual shirts and jackets. "One had a pick-axe handle, some had rubber tubes, and I saw a piece of chain about 18 inches long," says Hoffman.

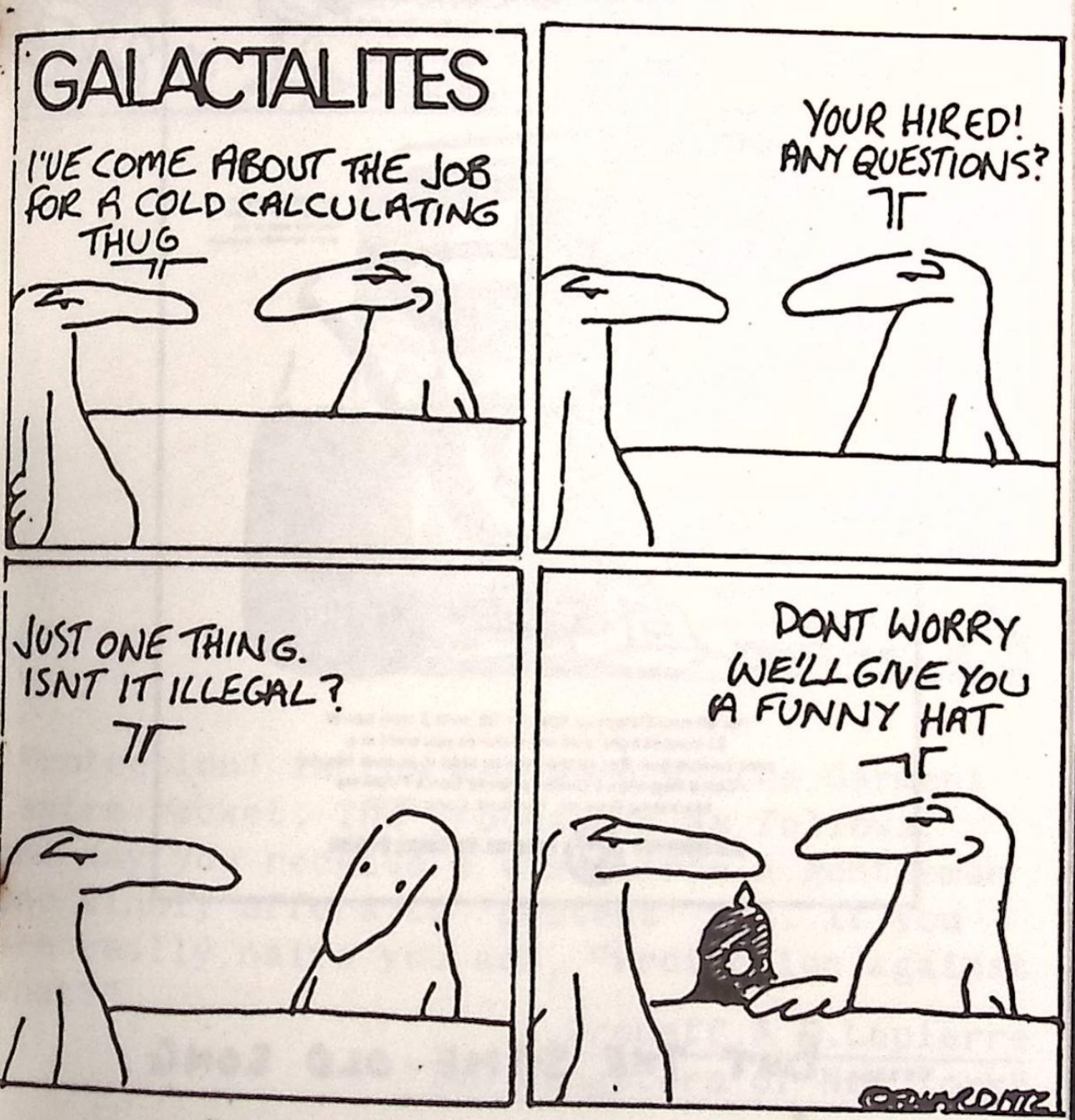
"What's that bloody rabble?" asked one of the uniformed officers. A colleague replied: "It's OK. They're ours."

THE SERVANTS OF POWER USE THEIR INITIATIVE.....

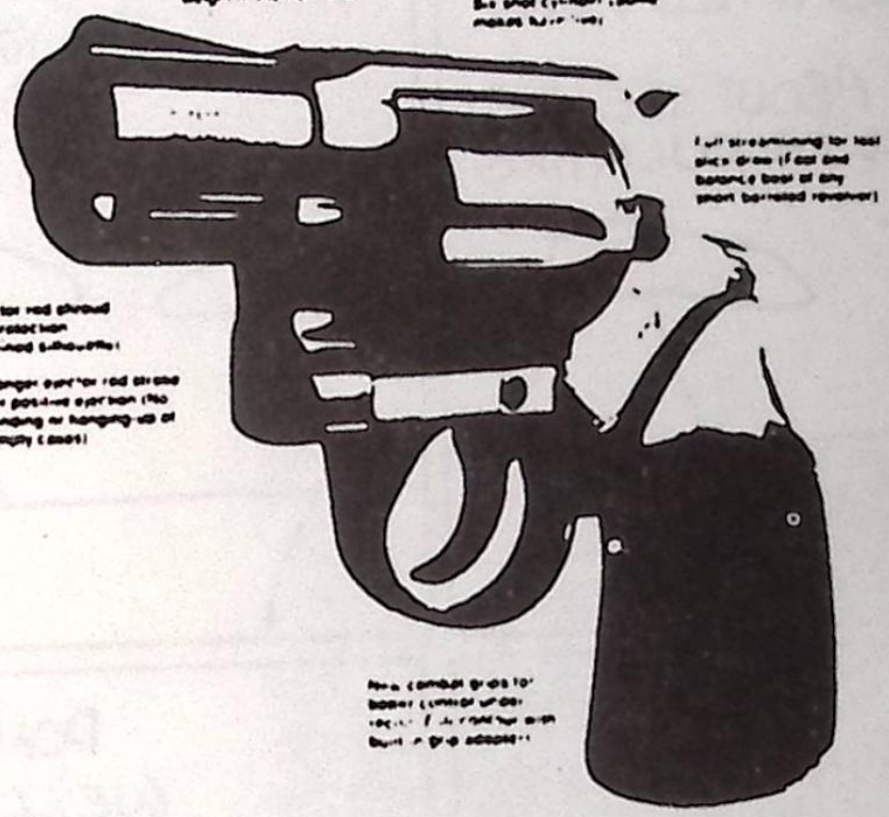


THE governor of Oxford prison, Mr James Horsfall last night urged the police to roll up their sleeves and get on with the job of "duffing up" offenders — with no court cases to follow.

.....AND POWER MAKES IT LEGITIMATE.


GALACTALITES
I'VE COME ABOUT THE JOB FOR A COLD CALCULATING THUG
YOUR HIRED! ANY QUESTIONS?
JUST ONE THING. ISNT IT ILLEGAL?
DONT WORRY WE'LL GIVE YOU A FUNNY HAT

The new voice of authority



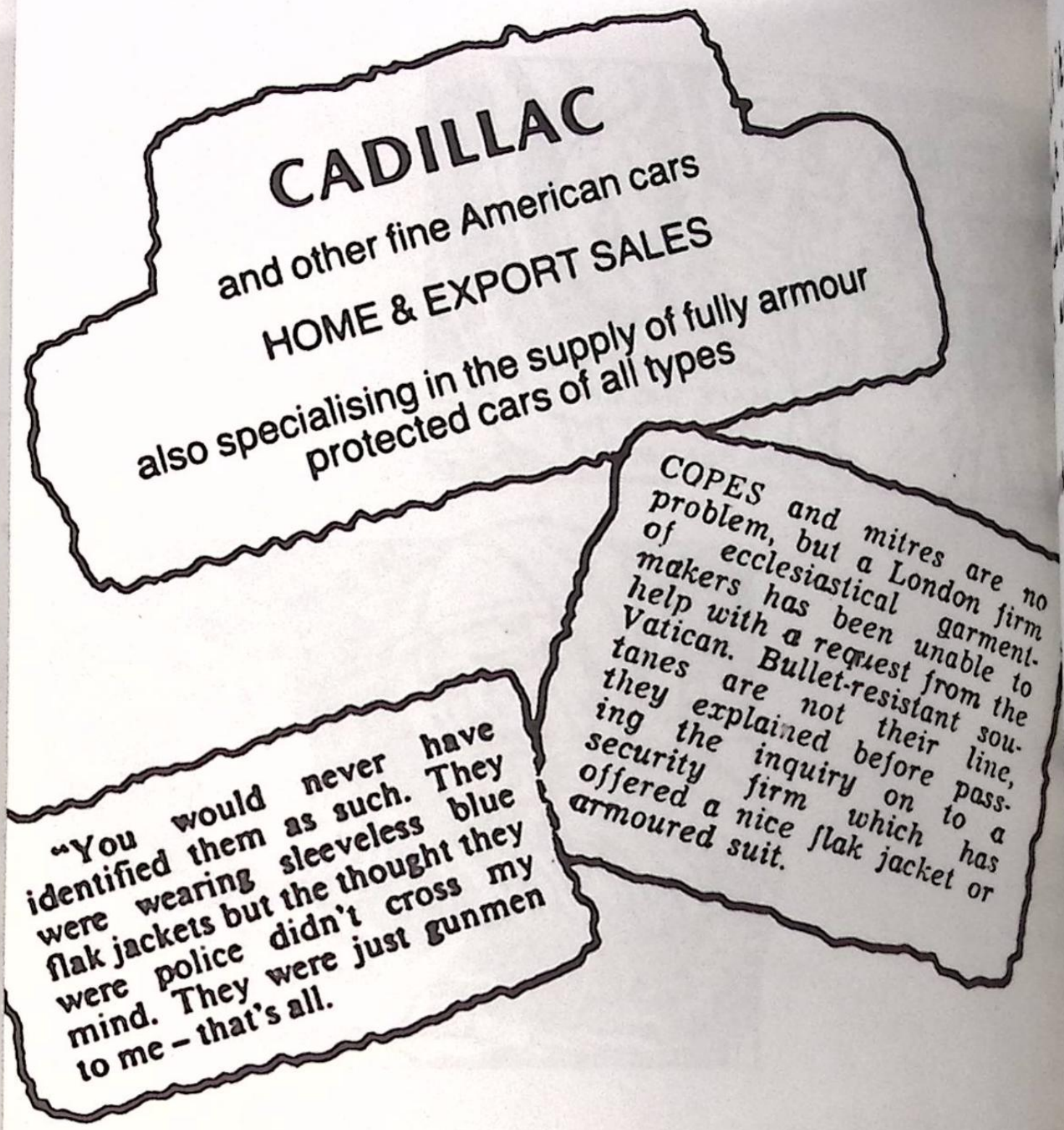
The all-new Detective Special 38 with 2 inch barrel 23 ounces light with the features you want in a concealable gun For all the details stop in at your nearby Colt's Registered Dealer or write Colt's Firearms Marketing Division Hartford Conn 06102

Firearms Marketing Division

..... BUT THE SAME OLD SONG.

'Protection' is the key word in the Garment Centre racket. The process is as follows: one day you receive a visit from a gentleman who kindly offers to 'protect' you. If you are really naive you ask, "Protection against what?"

S.Groueff & D.Lapierre
"The Gangsters of New York"


CADILLAC
and other fine American cars
HOME & EXPORT SALES
also specialising in the supply of fully armour protected cars of all types
COPES and mitres are no problem, but a London firm of ecclesiastical garment-makers has been unable to help with a request from the Vatican. Bullet-resistant soutanes are not their line, they explained before passing the inquiry on to a security firm which has offered a nice flak jacket or armoured suit.
"You would never have identified them as such. They were wearing sleeveless blue flak jackets but the thought they were police didn't cross my mind. They were just gunmen to me – that's all.

The society of the spectacle had begun everywhere in coercion, deceit and blood, but it promised a happy path. It believed itself to be loved. Now it no longer promises anything. It no longer says: "What appears is good, what is good appears." It simply says: "It is so."

Guy Debord

But, for all its violence, the Spectacle knows that its only real security lies in the construction and maintenance of myths and illusions.

First and last it is a show.

Searchlights swung across the heads of the multitude. "One recognises nothing but a grey mass, shoulder to shoulder." A radio-link established exact synchronisation with all other assemblies throughout the nation when Goebbels proclaimed a minute's silence for a mining disaster which had most opportunely occurred that very day. Hitler then spoke in praise of the dignity of labour and of how the worker was to be the essential factor in the new Germany. A million and a half voices joined in singing the Horst Wessel anthem. Before presenting Hitler to his vast audience, Goebbels saw that the sun would soon break through the clouds. He timed his own speech so that the God-given light should stream down on Hitler as he took his place on the speaker's rostrum.

THE Tories are deploying a formidable weapon in their election campaign: the Sincerity Machine. It was used with considerable skill by Mrs Thatcher when she addressed an enraptured 3,000 Scottish supporters in Perth on Friday.

The Sincerity Machine uses an offstage camera to transmit the image of a rolling script to two television sets lying on their backs in front of the speaker and concealed from the audience by two open-topped blue boxes.

The picture from the screens is reflected up to a couple of clear plastic lecterns placed slightly in front of, and to each side of, the speaker.

The images, invisible to the audience, can be seen by the orator, who reads them out while seeming to stare through the lectern screens.

The Sincerity Machine could prove to be crucial in a campaign which, all parties concede, will be fought mainly through television.

Elections are great spectacles where illusions, myths and images struggle for our applause and acceptance. The choice is illusory because, whichever government we choose, we always get upholders of the three basic rules – work, consume, respect authority.

POLICE swinging bamboo clubs yesterday attacked a peaceful demonstration of blind and disabled people who were trying to present the Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, with a petition for job and education opportunities.

About 100 people were injured, 25 of them seriously. When it was over, dozens of demonstrators — most of them blind and many of them handicapped in other ways — lay bleeding in the street near Mrs Gandhi's home.

Reporters, who saw the attack said the police waded into the crowd. The blind groped about the street in panic, falling over one another. Others on crutches tried to hobble away, but not quickly enough to avoid the clubs.

The demonstration was organised to coincide with the International Day of the Disabled.

Police said the demonstration was illegal because the streets near Parliament and the Prime Minister's residence are out of bounds to demonstrators

A government which respects the dignity of every single man and woman, regardless of caste, creed or ideology

And above all, a government which understands your concerns, your problems, your hopes, your dreams and your reason for living

Mrs Gandhi's election address

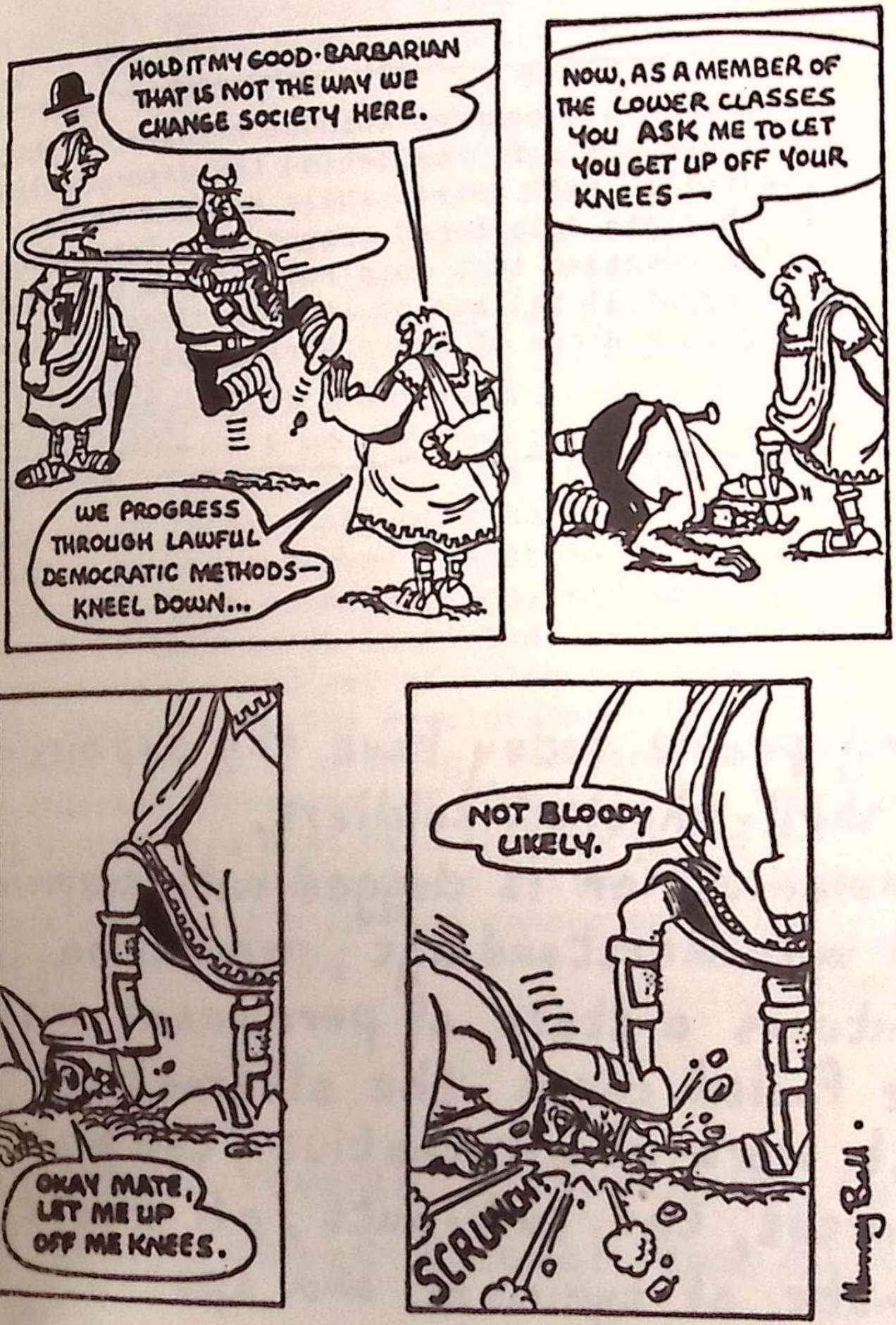
"A manifesto is issued to get votes and it is not to be taken as gospel"

Lord Justice Denning

Although power is sustained by the threat of violence, it always applauds non-violence in its opponents. It offers 'reasonable', 'civilized' negotiation because there it is fighting on a terrain where, if it cannot always win, it can at least postpone defeat indefinitely.

At least two factors favour an establishment's using the tactic of postponement: (1) The agitators may become impatient and reckless. If they break a civil law, they can be jailed. (2) The agitators may be patiently persistent and wait, which allows the establishment to defer indefinitely.

If an establishment elects a strategy of avoidance, a number of tactics are available to deal with the ideology and its proponents.
The decision makers themselves or their representatives may choose, for example, a tactic of counterpersuasion. Entering into a discussion with the leaders of an agitative movement in an attempt to convince the agitators that they are wrong serves a number of functions for the establishment. If counterpersuasion is successful, the threat to the system is minimized. If unsuccessful, the establishment has still gained time and avoided any significant revision of establishment ideology and structure.


HOLD IT MY GOOD BARBARIAN THAT IS NOT THE WAY WE CHANGE SOCIETY HERE.
WE PROGRESS THROUGH LAWFUL DEMOCRATIC METHODS— KNEEL DOWN...
NOW, AS A MEMBER OF THE LOWER CLASSES YOU ASK ME TO LET YOU GET UP OFF YOUR KNEES—
OKAY MATE, LET ME UP OFF ME KNEES.
NOT BLOODY LIKELY.
SCRUNCH!
Murray Ball.

During World War II a bearded Chindit soldier, fighting with General Wingate's f es behind the Japanese lines in Burma, actually fell asleep while a storm of machine-gun bullets splattered around him. Subsequent investigation revealed that this soldier was not merely reacting to physical fatigue or lack of sleep, but surrendering to a sense of overpowering apathy.

Alvin Tofler
"Future Shock"

Many people today have the appearance of shell-shocked soldiers. Communication is dogged with suspicion and misunderstandings; repression maintains a state of permanent crisis. The failed cures, the alternatives that were no alternative, the broken promises, the sell-outs, all create a climate of cynicism and apathy.

Much of what makes people dissatisfied with their lives is their own moral poverty. They are encouraged on every side to be mean, petty, vindictive, spiteful, cowardly, covetous, jealous, dishonest, stingy, etc. That this pressure from the system removes much of the blame for these vices does not make it any less unpleasant to be possessed by them. An important reason for the spread of religious movements has been that they speak to this moral inquietude, inspiring people to a certain ethical practice that provides them with the peace of a good conscience, the satisfaction of saying what they believe and acting on it (that unity of thought and practice for which they are termed "fanatics".)
The revolutionary movement, too, should be able to speak to this moral inquietude, not in offering a comfortingly fixed set of rules for behaviour, but in showing that the revolutionary project is the present focus of meaning, the terrain of the most coherent expression of compassion; a terrain where individuals must have the courage to make the best choices they can and follow them through, without repressing their bad consequences but avoiding useless guilt.

Ken Knabb

We need to reverse perspective, to stop seeing things through the eyes of power.

"If that there King was to wake", added Tweedledum, "you'd go out - bang! - just like a candle!"
"I shouldn't!" Alice exclaimed indignantly. "Besides, if I'm only a sort of thing in his dream, what are you, I should like to know?"
"Ditto", said Tweedledum.
"Ditto, ditto", said Tweedledee.
"Well it's no use your talking about waking him", said Tweedldum, "when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real".
"I <u>am</u> real!" said Alice, and began to cry.
"You won't make yourself a bit realler by crying", Tweedledee remarked.

Lewis Carroll
"Alice Through the Looking Glass"

By our propaganda, conversations and actions we must create situations which jolt people out of customary ways of seeing things; situations which make transparent the illusions fabricated by the spectacle.
But the spectacle is also obsessed with documenting its own decomposition. Sociologists, journalists and other specialists recuperate critiques of the spectacle.

Their chronicles of misery bog down our anger in statistics, reports, surveys and assessments. The threat to the spectacle is neutralized by the creation of a general mood of cynicism, resignation and apathy.

A revolutionary theory which concentrates solely on mounting a critique of the spectacle runs the danger of simply adding to this general cynicism and to the passivity and resignation which that cynicism engenders.

It is not enough to analyse the misery of daily life and its causes, we must speak of our dreams and desires and provide examples of <u>life as it could be.</u>

We must start to build the world we want now — in our relationships, our

interactions and interventions and in the way we conduct ourselves in our daily lives.

The only way to develop a revolutionary theory is to try to put it into practice, within the barriers that surround us and against the opposition we will undoubtedly face.
Revolutionary theory is developed on the basis of lived experience. Its goal is the total supersession of the commodity spectacle. A revolutionary movement based on the development of a revolutionary theory is participatory.

A movement based on an ideology is about as participatory as a 'painting-by-numbers' kit.

Revolution is a process - and it is a process that can be started now.

Under each result and under each project of an unfortunate and ridiculous present, we see inscribed the "Mene, Tekel, Upharsin" which announces the inevitable fall of all cities of illusion. The days of this society are numbered; its reasons and its merits have been weighed and found to be lacking; its inhabitants are divided into two parties, one of which wants this society to disappear.

Guy Debord

"So I wasn't dreaming, after all", Alice said to herself, "unless - unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's my dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream", she went on in a rather complaining tone: "I've a great mind to go and wake him, and see what happens!"

Lewis Carroll
"Alice Through the Looking Glass"

THIS ISSUE

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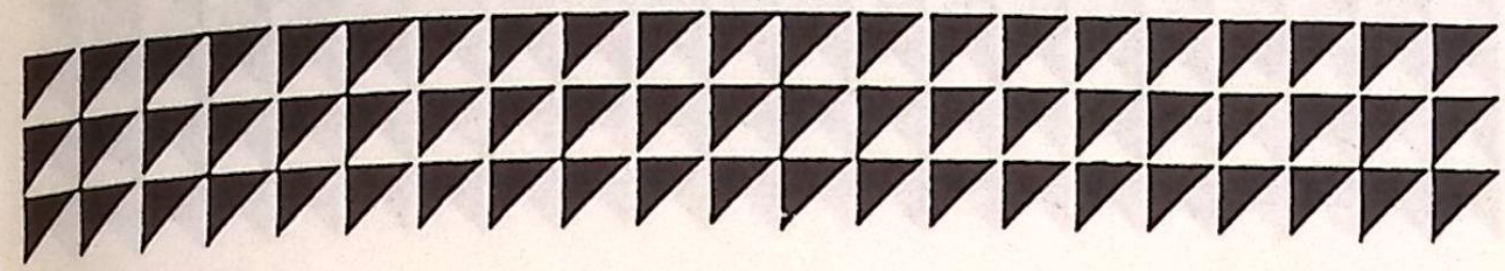

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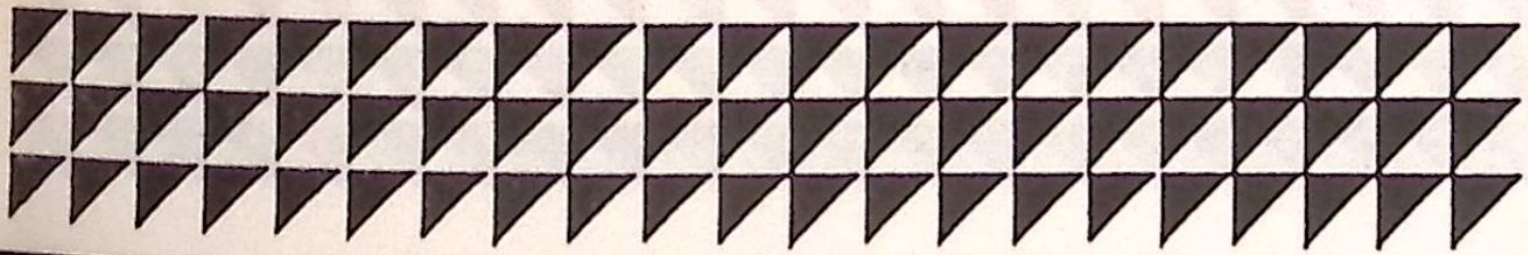

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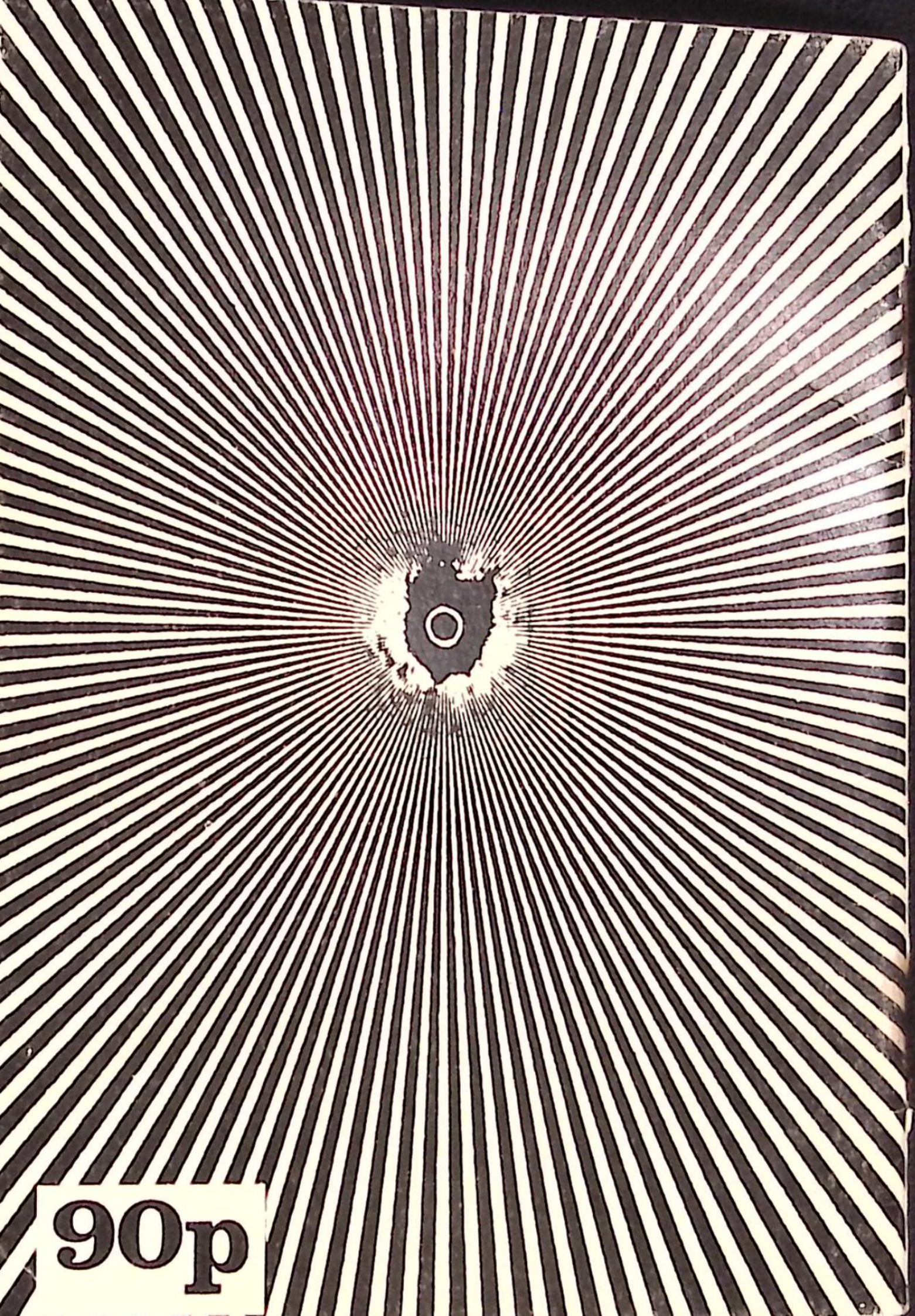

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